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SUBJECT: KADUNA GOVERNOR SAYS A NORTHERN GOVERNOR WILL
LIKELY EMERGE AS PDP NOMINEE FOR 2007

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne per 1.4 b and d

1. (C) Summary: During a July 27th meeting with the Consul General Kaduna State Governor Ahmed Makarfi predicted that one of the PDP Northern governors would get the ruling party's PDP presidential nomination for the 2007 elections. Makarfi also revealed the PDP would retain its current pro-Obasanjo national leadership at the party convention tentatively set for November as a way to hamstring Vice President Atiku and his presidential ambitions. Obasanjo opposes both Atiku and former head of state Babangida and no one would capture the PDP nomination without Obasanjo's imprimatur, asserted Makarfi. Despite the imbroglio regarding resource control, Markarfi deemed the recently concluded National Political Reform Conference a success. Although a northerner, Markarfi stated he would advise President Obasanjo to agree to the South-South's demanded increase for their derivation fund from 13 to 25 percent. End Summary.

Obasanjo Maneuvering to Thwart Atiku and Babangida

2. (C) On July 27, Kaduna governor Makarfi told the Consul General the PDP would make no major changes in the party's national leadership positions during its 2005 convention, tentatively set for November. The party plans to defer those decisions until after the presidential candidate is selected. That selection, predicted the Governor, would not happen until the second quarter of 2006, at the earliest. Under PDP rules, the president and key party officials must come from different geo-political zones. Selection of the presidential nominee should be first, then the party would know how better to zone the party chairmanship and other positions in the National party secretariat.

3. (C) By making the 2005 convention a "non-event," Obasanjo was attempting to straitjacket his Vice President, explained Makarfi. The vice president desperately needed to overhaul the PDP hierarchy to get "his people" in position in time to support his 2007 bid. By preventing this, Obasanjo is keeping the Vice President in limbo. Obasanjo was purposely dilatory in order to postpone until after the presidential nomination the showdown between his faction and Atiku over the national secretariat. Obasanjo even wants to delay the presidential nomination as late as he possibly can. This way he keeps Atiku in a box. Atiku is unlikely to bolt the party while the nomination is a possibility. Makarfi believed that Atiku would form a new party if he lost the PDP nomination. However, if maneuvered to remain in the PDP until after failing to attract a presidential nomination, Atiku would be forming his new party with the negative momentum of a loser and not much time to alter that perception, the usually reserved Makarfi beamed. In addition to hobbling Atiku, the President told Makarfi that former head of state Babangida's journey to the party nomination would be roadblocked.

4. (C) Due to the good news on debt relief, Obasanjo's stock has soared appreciably and the political temperature has likewise cooled, Makarfi analyzed. As long as he does not attempt to succeed himself and if he can maintain this elevated standing, Obasanjo will have sufficient power to checkmate his opponents from the nomination and will be the single most important factor in determining who will be the ultimate victor.

If Not Those Guys, Then Who?

5. (C) Assuming the next PDP candidate will be a northerner and that Obasanjo trips Atiku and IBB, Makarafi said the PDP northern governors constituted the most likely candidate pool. Makarfi dismissed members of Obasanjo's cabinet as technocrats, not politicians who have mastered the hurly burly of Nigerian electoral politics. Furthermore, no one in the National Assembly has sufficient gravitas to sustain a run for the presidency.

6. (C) Himself a member of this gubernatorial pool, Makarfi

thought he stood a fair chance. He cautioned he was not actually pursuing the grail, but merely positioning himself to be in the right place at the right time. He assessed his primary competitors to be Governor Muazu of Bauchi State and Governor Adamu of Nassarawa. Makarfi stated that his state's size, its history as the political capital of the North, and his good relations with other PDP governors would put him in good stead. Conversely, while Obasanjo liked Adamu most PDP governors disliked their Nassarawa colleague and thought him even too corrupt by their lax standards. Muazu, on the other hand has done a good job but Bauchi is a small state and he is viewed as a bit of a jester by too many of his colleagues to be a serious presidential candidate. By process of elimination that leaves me, Makarfi stressed.

17. (C) Makarfi contended a southern governor would be the most likely vice president. Because Obasanjo is from the Southwest, a governor from that zone would be excluded. Obasanjo would prefer River State Governor Odili but he is highly controversial and unpopular in his South-South region. Governor Duke from Cross River is the most likely if the VP is to come from the South-South. The distrust between Obasanjo and the four other South-South governors is mutual with no sign of relenting. Sam Egwu of Ebonyi is the likely one should the VP slot get zoned to the South East. The other Southeastern governors are erratic and, save for Governor Nnamani of Enugu, not close to Obasanjo. However Nnamani is immature and feared to be unstable. Both Duke and Egwu enjoy Obasanjo's confidence.

18. (C) Makarfi termed the National Political Reform Conference successful despite the controversy regarding resource control. In the end, the debate, albeit heated, was healthy, he believed. Makarfi said he would counsel Obasanjo to increase the South-South's allocation from 13 to 25 percent, however with some strings attached to ensure the added funds were spent on health, education and key developmental needs.

Comment

19. (C) Makarfi correctly assessed that the news on debt relief has strengthened Obasanjo's domestic political hand. The bandwagon effect is alive and well in Nigeria. Right now the pendulum swings in the president's favor, but it can quickly reverse course. In any event, VP Atiku is in a strategic bind. The longer the PDP tarries in changing party leadership, the less time Atiku will have to mobilize people and resources for his candidacy within the PDP, or with a new party. Makarfi's view that a Northern governor may be the nominee rings plausible, albeit infected by a degree of self-interested thinking. While trying to soft pedal his ambition, Makarfi wants the nomination. He has been working on things like the Political Reform Conference to improve his relationship with President Obasanjo. Obasanjo and Makarfi have also identified a mutual enemy - Atiku - and are working together to undermine him. End Comment.

110. (C) Makarfi apparently views the path to the nomination as a war of attrition, not a quick sprint to glory. He appears content to let, and to abet where possible, the process of elimination remove bigger named rivals like Atiku and IBB, and then make his move afterward. Whether this strategy succeeds is uncertain but it is probably based on a decent hunch. Obasanjo likely wants to be the last of his generation to be president of Nigeria. He wants to be Nigeria's elder statesman and he probably would feel quite comfortable knowing the next head of state is younger and beholden to him. This would help Obasanjo achieve his legacy as a reformer. This view of Obasanjo's is one of the factors that informs Makarfi's strategy and actions.

BROWNE